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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (03/06): PALESTINIANS QUESTION  
U.S. RESOLVE TO HALT SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

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Main Stories:  
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Al Quds leads with Israeli police restrictions on access to Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque Friday prayers. The report that also appears on Al Ayyam's front page and an inside page of Al Hayat Al Jadida, adds that the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality ordered on March 5, that two apartment buildings in East Jerusalem housing 250 Palestinians, be destroyed within 10 days. Al Ayyam further adds that Israeli authorities in Hebron ordered the demolition and halt to construction of eight Palestinian houses and four water tanks. The papers quote Palestinian sources in Jerusalem and Hebron describing the orders as political in nature, not administrative, and tantamount to ethnic cleansing and displacement of Palestinians.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with the March 5 killing of three Palestinian militants and injury of three others in the Al Maghazi area of the Gaza Strip. Al Ayyam cites AFP when quoting an Israeli military spokesman revealing that military strikes have been conducted against smuggling tunnels near Rafah, at the Gaza-Egypt border.

The three papers run a second lead story with photographs of the killing by police in Jerusalem of a Palestinian bulldozer driver who ran into an Israeli bus and police car on March 5. Papers run comments by the driver's brother, disagreeing with the Israeli police assessment that the incident was a "premeditated" attack. The brother calls it a traffic accident, stressing that the driver was not politically active nor affiliated with any political groups.

He added that Israeli police raided the family home after the incident and arrested his father and two brothers, according to reporting.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page a Reuters report on extending the term of U.S. Security Coordinator General Dayton for an additional two years to continue work on assisting Palestinian

Authority (PA) security forces. The report quotes, unnamed U.S. and Western officials revealing that the Obama administration is planning an increase in support to the PA security forces. The 70% funding increase would total \$130 million in assistance in comparison to the 2008 amount of \$75 million. No State Department response is included in reporting.

Al Ayyam and Al Quds front page an AFP report on the non-binding resolution sponsored by U.S. Congressman Steve Rothman demanding tighter oversight of U.S. assistance to Palestinians in order to ensure that no assistance is diverted by terrorists. The report includes a demand that the U.N. better monitor UNRWA activities in the Gaza Strip.

Al Quds' front page runs a Reuters report on plans by U.S. President Obama to attend the G-20 summit meeting to discuss the global financial crisis and security issues next April.

Al Quds runs front page coverage of statements by Palestinian Authority Premier Fayyad, speaking during a March 5 cabinet meeting in Ramallah, thanking countries for their participation in the Gaza reconstruction conference in Egypt. Fayyad is also quoted highlighting the strong international support for ending the Israeli occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state.-----

BLOCK QUOTES:

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1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "The Israeli onslaught and absent Arab response" (03/06): "The [Israeli settlement and demolition] campaign increased during U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to the region, during which she announced opposition to [Israeli] settlement activities and their danger to the peace

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process... if the new U.S. administration were really serious, Israel would not be bold enough to issue wholesale demolition orders and construct wholesale settlement units, as American envoys smile at the cameras and announce the continuation of peace efforts."

2) Fakhri Al Haj Mohamad opines in Al Quds under the title, "President Obama and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (03/05): President Obama will go down in history as the first U.S. president of African origin, but the question remains if President Obama will also go down in history as the president who solved the world's most complicated conflict... [and succeeded] where other U.S. administrations failed."

WALLES